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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 000233

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/FO AND AF/E
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER
CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/25/2032

TAGS: PREL PINR MOPS MASS ET SO

SUBJECT: SOMALIA: PRIME MINISTER MELES URGES DIPLOMACY
TAKE CENTER STAGE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO. REASONS: 1.4 (A), (B), (D).

¶1. (S/NF) SUMMARY. Prime Minister Meles called the USG's AC-130 strike "terrific" in targeting extremists without any civilian casualties, but termed the Washington Post press report--less than 24 hours after the strike--as unacceptable.

The leak comes as Meles hosts the African Union summit with some 30 heads of state arriving in Addis to select a new AU Assembly Chair. Meles said the strike has made it difficult to keep the Arab League, European Union, and some African states focused on support for IGASOM and peace-building in Somalia. PM Meles made it clear that there would be no/no suspension of either activities (i.e., targeting and intelligence-sharing) by our fusion cell or any other intelligence-sharing operations, and that the GOE and USG must continue cooperation. He reasserted the commitment by the Ethiopian military (ENDF) to maintain its objectives of striking against high-value individuals/targets (HVI/HVT). But Meles underscored that the headlines and center stage of attention for Somalia must be diplomacy and peace-building, not U.S. military operations. The PM questioned the secrecy of the AC-130 gunship location, and requested that for operational security, the aircraft should depart the area. In addition, he requested that there not/not be any U.S. military strikes in Somalia, for now, due to lack of operational security. End Summary.

GOE COMMITTED TO MIL-MIL RELATIONS AND STRIKING HVI/HVT

¶2. (S/NF) Ambassador met privately with Prime Minister Meles on January 25 to discuss the GOE decision to suspend operations by our fusion cell on Somalia. He replied that there was No/No suspension of mil-to-mil relations, and that operations, specifically intelligence-sharing and targeting of HVI/HVT, must continue. His generals met today, he said, but tomorrow we could resume all contacts and information-sharing.

¶3. (S/NF) The Prime Minister made it clear that the ENDF will continue its objectives of neutralizing extremist elements and HVI/HVT, and that Ethiopia welcomes information from the USG. The PM stressed that information and material obtained from Somalia is fully accessible and will be openly shared with the USG. He underscored the importance of Ethiopia's bilateral relationship with the United States.

LEAKS TO MEDIA CAUSE PROBLEMS

¶4. (S/NF) PM Meles termed the second AC-130 gunship strike on January 23 as "terrific." The targets were hit, and there were no civilian casualties. The problem was that in less than 24 hours after the strike, the Washington Post published a report on it, clearly showing there is no "opsec" on these military operations, he said. (NOTE: The press leak comes at a very sensitive time. PM Meles is hosting the African Union Summit, which will attract over 30 heads of state to select a new AU Assembly chair. END NOTE.) The headlines on Somalia are not diplomacy and peace-building, but U.S. military operations. This has caused the Arab League and European Union, as well as some African states, to question/weaken support for IGASOM and peace-building in Somalia, the Prime Minister remarked. (NOTE: In a subsequent meeting with State Minister of Foreign Affairs Tekeda, Ambassador was told that the focus of Ethiopia was military operations, and that Ethiopia was operating under the "thumb" of the United States, thus detracting from the overall objective of Ethiopia to promote peace-building in Somalia. END NOTE.)

END AC-130 STRIKES; REFRAIN FROM MILITARY STRIKES

¶5. (S/NF) The Prime Minister questioned whether the location of the AC-130 gunships could be protected. He requested that for opsec purposes the gunships be removed from the area. In addition, the Prime Minister requested that the U.S. refrain

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from further military strikes in Somalia, which would dominate press headlines and detract from the current efforts to push for IGASOM deployment and peace-building in Somalia. He stated that his ENDF would act on information relating to where extremists were located. (NOTE: The ENDF has been effective in acting quickly and engaging targets. END NOTE.)

COMMENT

¶6. (S/NF) We recommend compliance with the Prime Minister's request for removal of the AC-130 aircraft. Heavy press interest has made it difficult to secure and protect AC-130 operations. The Somalia fusion cell continues to provide an important function welcomed by the Ethiopians. The fusion cell will be able to deconflict and support ENDF operations, as well as maintain close U.S.-Ethiopian mil-mil ties. We also recommend that during General Abizaid's farewell call on the Prime Minister, the potential problem of extremists returning to Mogadishu be addressed. For the ENDF and GOE, in the long term, the concern is that if extremists are not dealt with effectively, they could raise serious challenges to the fragile TFG. END COMMENT.
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